

Washington, DC – Today Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) praised the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) decision to reduce benzene emissions in its Mobile Source Air Toxics (MSAT) rule. Congressman Blumenauer has been a leader in the effort to change an EPA proposal that would have allowed benzene pollution in the Pacific Northwest to be the highest in the country. Benzene, a chemical found in gasoline, is known to cause cancer in people and is also linked with leukemia and blood disorders and reproductive complications.

"The Pacific Northwest has the highest benzene fuel content in the country, and I was outraged that it might be allowed to persist," said Congressman Blumenauer. "I am pleased the EPA listened to the concerns expressed by members of the Northwest delegation and are taking positive steps to safeguard the health and air quality of our region."

The final MSAT rule establishes a "cap" for benzene content in gasoline, which will require refiners nationwide to take positive steps to reduce their overall benzene content, and limit Pacific Northwest citizens' exposure to this known carcinogen. Starting in 2011, refiners must meet an annual average benzene content standard of 0.62 percent by volume in all gasoline nationwide, a reduction of today's average of approximately 1.0 percent. The EPA estimates that areas where benzene levels are currently highest, such as the Northwest, will experience the most significant reductions.

In December, 2006, Congressman Blumenauer urged the EPA to re-write their regulations to reduce benzene fuel content in gasoline in the Pacific Northwest. He sent the EPA a letter that was signed by five members of the Pacific Northwest delegation, including Reps. Brian Baird (D-WA), Darlene Hooley (D-OR), Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Dave Reichert (R-WA), and Jim McDermott (D-WA).